

Oral history with 78 year old male, Lewiston, Idaho (Transcription)

Start 7A(3)

SS: Do you know when they first started the Clearwater log drives?

WS: Yeah, it was pretty tough then. You know, there was no machinery. It was all hand work, you know, peavy. Everything. And they had damn tough--the river was on the raise, you know an inch or two a day, everyday, you had a beach, gig right along but it was goin' the other way, droppin' you know, it was tough. You'd catch up with the same log maybe five or six times a day, you know, big stuff and you'd <unintelligible text> hand and go to the rear again . You'd catch up wit-

<unintelligible text>----2-

again, that wasn't too - interesting, but if it was on the rage, why you had to beach. But then they got machinery; drum cats, bulldozers and skiddin' cats and Christ, they used to put'em on thos island, you know, them skiddin' cats. Have a raft, a catraft and carry 'em on the raft about two of them small cats on a raft and land on them islands, dump'em off and they could go to work. That simplifies that drivin' a whole lot. Shortened it up and made it about 100 percent easier. you know, you didn't have that old drive to handle all the time. But then they got drum cats and put lines on them piers, you know, bridge piers pull that stuff off. That simplified things a lot. That was a lot of awful hard pickin', you know, with a peavey, and that simplified that and that speeded it up. I put in I think the longest hitch I think 104 days on that drive and the shortest one about four days, I guess. High

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water. That was in '48, I believe it was. But we come in boom--couldn't keep up with the rear, it just sailed, you know, everything. Then about thirty million went over the dam and down the Snake. Christ, I was in Portland that time, we was all summer pickin' 'em up. About thirty million feet. Yeah, we was all summer pickin' 'em up, about thirty million feet we picked up. Had a spot where we run a boom out and catch 'em, you know and load 'em back on cars or trucks or whatever you could get in there with and haul 'em back up here to the mill. Yeah, that was quite an operation. They didn't make no money on them logs, I don't think but they had to get 'em out of the river you know, navigable stream, you know that Snake. They couldn't leave 'em in there. I don't suppose they would've anyway, timber's pretty valuable. Oh, no, they'd have picked 'em up. But it took all summer long up into the winter we was pickin' them up. That wasn't so hot when it got cold.

SS: What was the equipment like and how did it work on those early log drives? What did you have?

WS: Didn't have any. All handwork, peavey. But then they got the skiddin' cats, they put a couple on a raft, you know, right with us all the time. And then they got

<unintelligible text>----3-

them drum cats, lines, you know. They'd sit on the bank and we'd run them lines out, haul back on the main line, back and forth. And they helped a hell of a lot. Then they put them bulldozers on islands when they could get to 'em, them big, flat bars you know, and clean them off, that was a great boost. Jesus Christ that gets awful tiresome rolling that old dry rear all day, you know.

SS: What did they call the boats that the- used?

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WS: Bateaux. B-A-T-E-A-U-X. They were French. French name you know. They go one yet out there at the mill. It's a old boat, it's out there--it's up on a pedestal I guess they're savin' it for--it's covered and everything, you know. Just one of them old bateaux they had here on the river. They were all hand powered, too, oars. Four oars and six oars on 'em. Mostly all four-oared boats. They'd have about three of them on the rear; one with machinery and th other two handled the crew, you know, mover the crew. Where they'd land on them centers--wherever the rear was they'd land and dump the crew off and they'd go to work and the boats would stay there, hang right on there until you were through. It was quite an operation, all right. But it was interesting, you know in a way. When they got that machinery that took the old muscle power out of it.

SS: What was it like before the machinery? When you were doing it by hand? How would it work? What did you guys have to do?

WS: Well, you'd land on some rear and get out of the boat. Of course, you had your peavy, that's all you had and go to work. Start puttin' 'em afloat. Every drive there you'd roll, roll, roll 'til you got goofy, but them centers they used to slip off pretty nice. They were in the center of the river most of 'em, you know. They build up on a rock or something and you cut 'em in front and get slack and then they'd move down, you know and sometimes they go completely, everything and you had to get in a boat and lots of places on that river you couldn't ride, too rough, someplaces you could, but some places you didn't want to try it, get dumped.

<unintelligible text>----4-

They had good luck, they lost, I think four men altogether. Lost three one day and one one other time. Lost one up there where that dam is, <gap> ? <gap> that big dam, you know,

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lost one there in that eddy one day and then they lost three more, oh, it's a way down, they swamped a boat. It was Spaulding, just above the bridge. A big cedar uproot come out from under the center, they was working on a center, there was only about six feet of water but was awful strong, you know, smooth but swift and this big cedartree, a cedar tree roots and everything some out from under this center and come out and come under the boat, you know raised the boat up and the stern of the boat dipped back into the water there, you see, and threw the guys out that were in the boat then and the boat righted itself but it was about two-thirds full of water. If them guys would've stayed with the boat, if they could have, they'd a been alright, they'll hold quite a crew, you know when they are full of water, but it went down and hit the bridge pier and and that was the end of that. But they were pretty lucky otherwise, that was all the men they lost.

SS: Were you there when that happened?

WS: Yeah: I was in the other boat just above 'em. I looked down and I see that big cedar comin' out and I said to them guys that were with me, I said, "They're gonna swamp that boat." And sure enough. We took after 'em but we couldn't catch 'em. There was one of 'em stayed right below the bridge pier, you know that big boil bar as you come up below anything that obstructs the water, you know big boil, well that held one of 'em up, you know. Them boils, you know, kept one of throwing 'em up, but the other two they went and by the time we got there he was gone, but he must have fought like hell, he went towards the shore and pulled all the roots and weeds and everything out for quite a ways, but we couldn't get to him. We picked the boat up down there on an island below. It was still afloat on the island you know, but just about--lacking about that much being full of water but it went up on the bar.

<unintelligible text>----5-

Library of Congress

We went down and got it and these other guys, there was three of them they went up a tree right there where they was working, and they were up the tree yet. <gap> ? <gap> nor nothing, hanging in that tree. And we had to get their boat out of the water and load it on a truck, take it back up and put it back in the river and go over and get them guys out of the tree. There was three of 'em and we had to land right where they landed. We landed right there and got 'em out of the tree. But the other three we never did get. Looked the rest of the day and that was it. They found two of 'em, oh about three miles, I guess below there. They were off on a bar, sandbar, and they were all sanded in just their face and hands stickin' out and the other one they got in here back of the depot(?) in a tree. He was up in a goddamned tree, the water had dropped you know and left him up in a tree and he didn't have a stitch of clothes on, he was stripped, you know. He went through that dam, you know, too, I guess that's what undressed him. Shoes, everything gone. He was up a tree, oh, about three or four feet off the ground up in the end limbs of a tree the water had dropped and left him up there.

SS: Who were the guys who lead those first river drives? Who were the pilots, who were supposed to know the river?

WS: Oh, the push. The push, you mean, yeah. Oh, well there several of 'em, worked for several of 'em. <unintelligible text> was the first one, he drove over from Beaver Creek. But there was one ahead of him, he was a driver from Big Eddy Dam, can't think of his name that's along time ago. This <unintelligible text> he had it then from Beaver Creek down and he drove there up until '38, he died in '38. And then <unintelligible text> took it, a fellow by the name <unintelligible text> his name was <unintelligible text>, he took it. He was a good man. He drove it for two or three years and he was a push then they made a superintendent outta him and then <unintelligible text> guy by the name of <unintelligible text> took it and he lives up there on Fourth Street now, he took it and he had it for--he

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come down here and went to work on the pond, took charge of the pond, took charge of the pond there, he had it for three or four years. And then there was a fellow by

<unintelligible text>----6-

the name of <unintelligible text>, he took it next. He was pretty old man but he had it until he died and then <unintelligible text>, he was the grand finale. He's still living. They had a doings out here at Spalding Park oh it's been about two months ago, of anybody who'd ever drove that river, you know. I wasn't going to go but I got shanghaied, they picked me up and threw me in a car, I was coming out of the liquor store, I had a bottle of whiskey and they threw me in the car and away I went! Had a good time. They had all kinds of eats, you know and I didn't eat nothin' I was drunk! I took a bottle of whiskey out, I'd just got it in the liquor store, didn't have a chance to get home with it, they picked me up and away I went and we drank the whiskey they was all kinds of it there anyhow and they give me a full bottle of it when I left!(chuckles) I didn't want it, I was going to stop and get another one, but I took it, and by God, I met <unintelligible text> and a couple more one day and they come over and helped me drink it.

SS: Did you tell me about the time when the boats got away from the drive? They got away; one of the bateaux just broke loose and went right down the river?

WS: Nobody in 'em?

SS: Well, somebody was in 'em, I thought you told me that they just got out of control and went way-to-hell down before they could stop 'em.

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WS: Well, that time those guys drowned to death's one time but I can't ever remember boats gettin' away. Did I tell you?

SS: Maybe you told me about one guy and then he got fired, they canned him.

WS: Oh: That was a raft, yeah. Yeah he--

End 7A(3)

I was on a raft with him pulling oars for him. They was five men on there, them rafts are pretty big you know. They had long sweeps in front and behind and one man run 'em. And he went about thirty-five miles ahead of the rear before he got stranded but I don't know whether he done it a-purpose or not, didn't look very good there lots of places he could a landed but we had to sleep on the bank until we caught up to the goddamned thing again. That wasn't very nice. <gap> came to, we were at-- oh, below Silver Creek, no,